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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 004507

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GENEVA FOF JEFF DELAURENTIS

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SUBJECT: U/S GROSSMAN'S MEETING WITH HUMAN RIGHTS NGOS

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) April 29, 2004, 1:45-2:30pm, U.S. Embassy Bogota

12. (U) Participants:

U.S.

U/S Marc Grossman
Ambassador William B. Wood
General James T. Hill, SouthCom
Ambassador Daniel A. Johnson, POLAD
Col. Napoli, Southcom
Stewart Tuttle, Deputy Political Counselor
Charles Barclay, WHA/AND
Kiersten Stiansen, Notetaker

Colombia

Mario Gomez, Restrepo Barco Foundation
Carlos Rodriguez, Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ)
Catalina Diaz, Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ)
Marco Romero, Consultancy for Human Rights and
Displacement (CODHES)
Patricia Villaveces, Free Country Foundation
Monsignor Hector Fabio Henao, Roman Catholic Church's
Social Pastoral Association

Summary

13. (C) Summary: On April 29, Under Secretary Grossman met representatives of five human rights organizations to discuss the human rights and humanitarian situation in Colombia. U/S Grossman emphasized the importance of advancing democracy and human rights and the USG's commitment to helping the GOC in these areas. All five organizations agreed that democracy and human rights go hand in hand and expressed their concerns regarding military collusion with paramilitaries, impunity, and continued violations, by all actors, of international humanitarian law. End Summary.

Strong Democracy Key to Success in Colombia

14. (C) During his April 29 visit to Bogota, U/S Grossman told human rights representatives that the USG considers the advancement of human rights and democracy to be a fundamental aspect of its policy in Colombia. Carlos Rodriguez of the CCJ said democracy can only exist in unison with the rule of law and a complete separation of powers in government. He expressed concern about granting "judicial" powers to the Armed Forces because it could aggravate the problem of impunity. U/S Grossman agreed that impunity for human rights violations is a problem and added that a strong judicial system is needed to ensure a strong democracy. U/S Grossman also explained that he and General Hill were in the meeting together to show that improving the security situation and strengthening the Colombian military go hand-in-hand with fostering democracy and respect for human rights.

Concerns Over GOC-NGO Polarization

15. (C) All NGO representatives agreed that relations between the GOC and domestic human rights groups are not ideal. Romero said he is concerned about the lack of diversity in the political arena. Rodriguez echoed this concern, asserting that President Uribe had increased polarization in the country with speeches in September 2003 and February 2004 in which he criticized some human rights activists as terrorist sympathizers. Romero and Monsignor Henao expressed concerns that the Government's policy of large-scale detentions was only applied against alleged guerrilla -- rather than paramilitary -- sympathizers.

Violence Down, but Concerns Remain Over Paramilitaries

16. (C) The Restrepo Barco Foundation's Gomez noted improvements in the overall human rights and security situation and said that many criticisms of Government security policy are inconsistent and depend on ideological predispositions. Monsignor Henao said it is important to acknowledge improvements but also look closely at remaining problems to determine if they affect certain groups disproportionately. U/S Grossman agreed. The organizations also pointed out that there continue to be ties between illegal paramilitaries and some elements of the security forces. U/S Grossman said the GOC must break "forever" any relationship between the Armed Forces and the paramilitaries. Regarding the paramilitary peace process, Diaz of the CCJ said negotiations must be conducted in a way that guarantees victims' rights and provides adequate reparations. She added that bringing real democracy to regions historically controlled by paramilitaries should be a priority.

U.S. Committed to Helping Improve Human Rights Situation

17. (C) U/S Grossman emphasized the USG's respect for Colombian human rights organizations and said the USG will continue to work with the GOC on improving the human rights situation. He added that he had raised the importance of human rights in his earlier meetings with the President and Vice-President. Success in Colombia will ultimately be measured not just by victories against narco-terrorism, but also by an increased Government commitment to human rights and the rule of law. Diaz complemented the Department for its 2003 Human Rights Report on Colombia and for its decisions in support of human rights, including the suspension of assistance to military units with questionable human rights records. U/S Grossman said he is proud of actions the Embassy has taken in support of human rights in Colombia.

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